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ABSTRACT

One of a series of pre-apprenticeship phase 1 training modules, this self-paced student training module deals with the influence and importance of an individual's relations with groups, organizations, and individuals beyond his or her immediate working environment and their effect on adjustment to a new job. Included in the module are the following: cover sheet listing module title, goals, and performance indicators; introduction; study guide/check list with directions for module completion; information sheet discussing relations with people in authority, relations with family and friends, and other influences such as trade unions; self-assessment; self-assessment answers; assignment, and post assessment. Emphasis of the module is on the role of authority and the two-way pressures of home and work and responsibility to other organizations and institutions. (Other related pre-apprenticeship phase 1 training modules are available separately--see note.) (MN)

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ED217263

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING SYSTEMS

PRE-APPRENTICESHIP
PHASE 1 TRAINING

WIDER INFLUENCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Goal:

The student will become aware of the influence and importance of his or her relations with groups, organizations and individuals beyond his or her immediate working environment. The student will learn about the role of authority, the two-way pressures of home and work and responsibility to other organizations and institutions, such as his or her trade and the union.

Performance Indicators:

The student will read about and discuss the importance of other influences on his or her settling down in a new job. He or she will complete the reading, the assignments and two exams.

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Study Guide

Read the following and check off each task as you have completed it.

1. ____ Read the Information section.

2. ____ Complete the Self Assessment and compare your answers with those on the Self Assessment answer sheet. If your answers are different, re-read the Information section.

3. ____ Complete the Assignments; these will involve writing and discussing with one or two other people.

4. ____ Complete the Post Assessment exam and then continue to the next module.

Information

In the modules so far, we have concentrated on the experience of working with and along side other people and the day-to-day interpersonal challenges and opportunities which that involves. However, we have not spent any time discussing the two entirely different roles that a supervisor or boss might have in relation to you. Also, it is of benefit to identify some of the other people and groups that can affect how soon you settle down in your job and what your expections for that job will be.

RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE IN AUTHORITY

First, there is your job of authority; this can be represented by workers with seniority, supervisors, employers and sometimes by customers. How do you respond to authority? What does it mean to you? Some people find it difficult to respond in a relaxed and confident way when they are being told to do something or being criticized. We have already looked at the skill of taking criticisms, but, when there is the added force of it coming from a person in an authority role, it may become even harder. In talking about people in authority, what is meant is those individiuals who have the privilege and power to make decisions about how and what work should be done, the right to direct others and the possibility of handing out rewards or punishments (in verbal or materialistic forms). Their role could seem like a stern and distant parent or it could be much more informal.

In some ways, the more formal a workplace, the easier it is to determine how to deal appropriately with people in authority because they are given titles and clearly defined roles. Your first goal should be to find out who has the authority. If this is not easy to identify through job titles, then you will have to ask very quickly who is entitled to give orders to you and who in turn gives directions to that person, and so on, up to the final authority. The last person is not always the most powerful because he or she will probably delegate a lot of authority. For example, the owner may wish to have nothing to do with the hiring, firing and other personnel issues; he or she will, in this case, hand the responsibility over.

So, if you have problems or grievances that cannot be solved in the manner described in the previous modules, it is very important to know who has the power to help you.

The larger the business you work for, the more specialized will be the roles of people working there. In a small working organization, however, the roles and the power are likely to more general and more informal; this can lead to a more relaxed atmosphere, but it can also present different problems. In an informal business, it is even more crucial, if you want to progress rapidly, that you find out what is expected of you as a worker. There are often unwritten rules and customs and chains of command that you disregard at your own peril. For example, it might happen that borrowing basic hand tools or even sitting on the wrong box during the lunch break could lead to unnecessary conflicts. Many customs and rules evolve over the course of time; there are often expectations of apprentices that you need to pick up very quickly and which vary from shop to shop. The advantages of informal authority is that people can be closer and get along well together; a disadvantage is that it is not always clear what your position is, and it is important that you find your place in the hierarchy and start to build the initial stages of your career identity around that.

A difficulty that many young workers have is learning how to behave toward their boss as an equal human being and yet, at the same time, accept orders and criticisms as if they were from a different person. In fact, these two ways of responding recognize two different roles that the person in authority has. The skill lies in not feeling put down by someone who has been joking with you a minute before; and being able to show respect for someone's authority when, during lunch break, you have been arguing with him or her about a movie you have seen or sharing food together. However, it is an important way to survive in a job, getting along with and impressing your immediate supervisor. You can do this by sharing an ability to relax with him or her in your communication and yet being able, also, to demonstrate to him or her your high level of performance on the job.

RELATIONS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

When you start a new job, you can predict quite a few changes in your present life style. You will have a new schedule, increased responsibilities, the possibility of out-of-town work, and the great pressure of having to learn the new social rules that allow you to fit in. It is potentially a tense time and it will affect not only you, but anyone you are close to--family, intimates, friends. It is during stressful times in your life that you need to recognize the possible bad effects

that they might have on your relationships. This can come about through your own new preoccupations, interests and uncertainties which take away from your giving as much time as you previously did to people you enjoy being with. This might be something for you to discuss with them so that they understand what might happen. Also, it is useful, if you are prepared for this possibility and you do want to keep your relationships healthy, to plan to devote quality time to the other person even if less hours are involved.

With the new demands of your job you might well ask yourself how much can you even talk about your work to people who do not know the environment and conditions that you are speaking to them about. Some new workers strain the patience and friendship of people they have known before they started their job. Of course, it might be that your new work involves you with new people and the chance of making new friends, in which case it might be necessary to resign yourself to seeing a lot less of former friends and acquaintances. This is something to be aware of and, if you are in a relationship that is extremely important to you, you will probably need to share with him or her the possible consequences and stresses on your relationship that taking your new job might bring about.

Take a simple but frequently recurring example: you discover that you cannot get a paid vacation for the first summer, when you had already planned to travel with your boy or girlfriend. An equal and happy relationship will come through many changes of plans and directions, but only if both people are aware of, and are open about, any clashes in their loyalties and responsibilites that might happen. Any relationship that is important to you will only prosper and grow by your caring for it. When you have an intimate, long-term relationship, it is not sufficient justification that your work is tiring, to come home, flip the switch and flop in front of the T.V. all night. Although your home is a place to relax, there is work to be done in maintaining a happy relationship.

Likewise, it is important that your leisure interests and activities are not submerged by work. Even when you are devoting a lot of time to your job, you need to keep your out-of-work interests alive and varied. One other point about the overlap of work experience to your outside work relationships is that "people problems" that originate on the job, should be dealt with on the job. It is too much to expect people close to you to be counselor, advisor and consultant on your interpersonal problems at work; you can only solve these by dealing with them on the spot, and the previous modules encourage you to do so.

There can be another unnecessary conflict when home issues are carried over into work. There are many problems, such as illnesses at home, responsibilities for children, money pressures, and, the most frequent problems, upset in your intimate relationship. Each one of us has the skill to turn on and off the display of our feelings; it is not necessary to go around with a large neon sign proclaiming: "I had an argument at breakfast." It is not the responsibility of the people you are working with to solve, or even sympathize, with your problems at home. You are the same person in both settings, but you have the ability that all of us have: to act in different ways with different people. If you are angry with your friend, tell your friend and don't take it out on, or bore, your fellow workers. It is relatively easy to leave all your problems behind when you are working in a more formal organization where personal matters are rarely discussed; in an informal work setting it may be more difficult. But, it is not essential to tell everyone your innermost secrets. A person who goes around moaning about his or her problems at home becomes a big bore. Whatever your experience at home, it rarely pertains to your work. If some circumstance arises which you see as very serious--for example, an accident or bad illness at home, then you have to decide your priorities. If it seems more important for you to be at home, then you must communicate that to your boss and then take full responsibility.

Remember, it's not what you do, but how you do it that makes all the difference. If you approach your boss and say, "I'm very sorry that this has happened, but I feel I have no choice but to stay at home and care for him or her at least for today. Is there any way that I can make up for the work I will lose?" Then your boss will have to very cold-hearted to be other than accepting to the inevitable. If your work relations are good, your fellow workers will always give you support in time of unforeseen emergencies.

OTHER INFLUENCES

There are many other groups you may have dealings with when you start work. Your relations with them could effect the level of satisfaction you reach in your job. Here, we will only mention very briefly a few of them.

When you are an apprentice, you have obligations and responsibilities to your trade, the representatives of that trade on the Apprenticeship Committee, and the instructors in your apprenticeship classes. The survival skills required in getting along with these are different from your straight forward person-to-person relations. Here, the central influence is your feeling of identity within the trade that has accepted

you; it is therefore, the standards, the values, the goals of that trade which will influence your behavior. If you can't accept the basic values of your trade, then you probably do not belong in it.

You might also be involved with a union. Again, your membership in a union should be in harmony with your own beliefs and behaviors. If you see the union as a body concerned with increasing the influence of workers on wages, hours, working conditions and job security, and you approve of that concern, then it is your responsibility to support it actively. If you have a different experience or view of your union, then again it is your responsibility either to be active and help to bring about change or to leave. It is useless to complain that your representatives have not done a good job if you never attend a meeting or bother to vote. It is a well-known comment (with a lot of truth in it) that the union is only as good as its members.

Each organization will offer other benefits and obligations. One example is social clubs or more frequently informal social get-togethers organized from work. Look at what is involved. What purpose are they serving? Is it important for you to attend and participate in order to be accepted by the other workers? Are invitations to social gatherings a sign that you are now fully accepted as a fellow worker? Are they being used by the employer to encourage better communication between workers? Find out who goes, what happens, what the consequences are of going or not going. Find out beforehand. You can decide whether to accept and, therefore, support the purpose behind the social activities, by taking part, or choose not to participate because you disagree with them or see them as not being fun or useful to you. The responsibility is yours. The advice here is to know, whatever you choose to do, what it is you are doing and why.

You will come in contact with other workers who are not in your particular trade. In construction work, many trades work in the same location. It is essential that you consider the people who will follow you into an area to complete another phase in the construction. If your work may create unpleasant conditions for other people, tell them about it before you start. If someone is finishing dry wall and you start spraying paint in an adjacent area because nothing is going to slow you down, then you are lining up trouble. At all times, as with interpersonal relations with your fellow workers, the main guideline is that your respect for another person as an individual with the same rights as yourself should be demonstrated in the way you behave to them.

Settling down at work might be affected by your relations with various Federal and State offices. For example, the taxes you pay can influence the number of hours you work and, as a result, could affect your feelings of well-being and even your relationships at home. It is difficult to separate completely the influence of any of these groups and organizations that you have dealings with or belong to, from your experience at work. When you start work, a whole new world of interconnections is created. It is like throwing rocks into a still lake; each possess a center of its own, but the ripples that radiate outward overlap and influence those coming from other center points. What is clear is that the more realistic you are about what might affect you when you start work, the more chance there is that you will stay in that job and enjoy it.

Self Assessment

Answer the following questions.

1. How do you identify who has authority in a work situation?

2. What is an informal workplace like?

3. What difficulties may arise in working for a boss who is very informal?

4. When you start in a new job, how might this affect your close "outside-work" relationships?

5. If you have relationship problems at home, where is the best place to deal with them and try to solve them?

6. If you are an apprentice, where is your first loyalty?

7. Satisfactory interpersonal relations have one thing in common. What is it?

Self Assessment Answers

1. Those people who have the privilege of making decisions about the work, the right to direct others and the power to reward or punish.

2. It is generally a more relaxed working atmosphere but also there are more unwritten rules and customs that you need to find out about if you are going to progress.

3. Being able to combine a respect for his or her authority, at the same time as responding to him or her as an equal human being.

4. It might strain them.

5. At home.

6. To your trade.

7. Respect for people as individuals.

Assignment

1. Make a list of the different roles you have during the course of one week. For example, you are a student, a friend, a son or daughter, you are a....etc. Identify and write down what your responsibilities are in each of these roles and discuss with a partner what you have found out.

2. Discuss with a partner and write down the reasons why you think school or college exists. How many of these reasons do you personally support and agree with?

3. Choose one job (full or part-time) that you have done, and write down all the rules and customs that you were supposed to follow. How many of these did you have to learn about by actual experience rather than by being told before you started?

4. Write down and then share with at least two other people, any experiences you, or maybe someone in your family, has had where work problems overlapped into the home. How were these dealt with?

Post Assessment

Write your name in the center circle. In the other circles write the names of other people (individuals and groups) and organizations that might have some effect on you when you start work.

Draw as many extra circles as you require.